



NEWSLETTER 2 ● NOVEMBER 2003

Dear Friends:

Thank you for the many comments and suggestions for planning for the future of Great Falls Park, Virginia. In the Fall of 2002, we began to develop a General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) for Great Falls Park to provide guidance on the best way to protect the park’s resources, serve the needs of our visitors, and address the concerns of our neighbors.

The GMP/EIS process requires that we explore a range of possible alternative future conditions and management strategies for the park. The EIS will include consideration of these alternatives based on the purpose and significance of the park, resource protection, visitor use, development needs, and information/education issues over the next 10 to 15 years. These alternatives will be defined in a draft GMP/EIS that will be available for public comment.

Since our first Newsletter in January 2003, we have had a public scoping meeting, met with numerous public agencies, and received comments. In this second Newsletter, we have used these ideas and organized them into three alternatives. These alternatives are:

- Alternative Concept A (the No Action alternative) that defines resource conditions where existing practices continue to guide park management;
- Alternative Concept B that emphasizes preservation of natural and cultural resources; and
- Alternative Concept C that provides for the expansion of recreational opportunities while ensuring protection of the park’s natural and cultural resources.

As part of the alternatives, we have identified management prescriptions that provide a description of the resource conditions and visitor experience we seek to achieve through these alternatives. We again seek advice, suggestions, and comments on these alternatives or the elements that make up each alternative.

The preparation of the GMP/EIS is anticipated to last approximately two years. Throughout this process, we will provide periodic updates and seek input at key planning stages. Your comments and ideas gathered during the GMP/EIS process were, and continue to be, instrumental in generating future guidance for the park.

We appreciate your assistance as we plan for Great Falls Park.

Sincerely,

Audrey F. Calhoun,
Superintendent
George Washington Memorial Parkway

HOW THE ALTERNATIVES WERE DEVELOPED

Between the month of May and September, 2003, the general management planning team, consisting of park staff, representatives from the NPS National Capital Region, and the EDAW consultant team, met to develop preliminary alternatives for the future management of Great Falls Park. Mailed comments received in response to Newsletter #1, and comments from the scoping meetings held in Spring of 2003, were all considered in the development of the alternatives.

Some of the public comments received address requirements that the park must undertake regardless of planning initiatives. Since much of the basic park management is specified in laws, policies, and mandates, issues that fall into this category will be addressed regardless of the alternatives. Examples of such issues are protection and preservation of endangered plant species and significant cultural resources. Each of the alternatives offers ways to meet these mandates.

Other comments were related primarily to visitor use, resource protection, and interpretation/education. Taken together, the comments have been organized into a series of major decisions that the GMP/EIS needs to make, while remaining consistent with the park’s purpose and significance.

The remaining comments reached beyond the scope of the GMP to suggest specific solutions to problems. These are valuable ideas and will be referred to again during future planning stages.

DECISION POINTS

Decision points are the key issues or questions that will be answered in the GMP/EIS. Six decision points were identified during the scoping process. The alternative concepts seek to address these. The decision points are as follow:

1. How should natural and cultural resources be managed to optimize the preservation of both?
2. What are the most appropriate levels of service and locations for visitor interpretation and education in the park?
3. What are the appropriate levels and locations of recreational activities such as picnicking, kayaking, dog walking, biking, horseback riding, climbing and boating in the park?
4. How should trails be managed with regard to use, connections to trails outside the park, and locations?
5. How should traffic and associated elements (parking spaces, time limits, etc.) be managed?
6. What are the most appropriate locations to support administration and operation functions with respect to minimizing resource disturbance?

THE ALTERNATIVES

The following sections of this Newsletter describe the three alternatives that have been developed for evaluation. Each alternative is built upon a different underlying concept that is reflected in the title of the alternative. Depending upon the review of comments received, NPS may prepare an additional alternative for evaluation. By the end of the GMP/EIS process, based on the evaluation of alternatives and public comments, one of these alternatives will be selected as a preferred alternative to guide the management of Great Falls Park.

The following are the three alternatives:

- Alternative Concept A (the No Action alternative) maintains the status quo in the park, with minor improvements.
- Alternative Concept B reflects an approach where the park’s primary focus would be protecting natural and cultural resources.
- Alternative Concept C reflects an approach where the park’s primary focus would be expanding resource- based recreational opportunities in the park while ensuring that sensitive resources are protected and valued.

For the park to implement these concepts, or a combination of these based on public comments and further analysis, seven management prescriptions have been developed. Management prescriptions identify various zones in the park to achieve a variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences. The location and size of each zone will vary based on the concept that each alternative seeks to achieve. For example, in the Canal Zone, protection of sensitive cultural resources such as the Patowmack Canal, would be given highest management priority. The Visitor Service Zone would focus on providing a high degree of orientation and interpretation of the park’s primary resources.

The three maps located at the end of this Newsletter illustrate how the management prescription zones vary according to the descriptions of the three alternative concepts. Additional resource information may be viewed at the following website:
www.nps.gov/gwmp/grfa/gmp



Patowmack Canal Trail